



National Research and Development Centre
for adult literacy and numeracy

Research Summary

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New initial teacher education programmes for teachers of literacy, numeracy and ESOL 2002/03: an exploratory study

Synopsis

This report reviews an investigation of 11 new initial teacher education programmes, largely in universities, for adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL teachers. All the courses were in their first year of implementation (2002/03).

The programmes were introduced to meet the new training requirements for language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) specialists: those intending to be teachers, or those starting their careers, have to achieve a full teaching qualification plus a specialist subject qualification in their field. This subject qualification relates to both personal skills and underpinning theory and practice, and is outlined in DfES subject specifications for teachers of adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL (DfES 2002 a, b).

The report begins by contextualising the research in government initiatives to improve the quality of initial teacher education in the Learning and Skills sector. It also introduces a conceptual framework for interpreting the different ways subject knowledge and teaching knowledge is balanced on courses.

The report moves on to profile the backgrounds and experience of trainees and staff in the sample, then explores some key themes:

- variation in programme structure;
- how programmes interpreted the DfES specifications for subject knowledge;
- the quality of teaching placements and mentoring;
- approaches to assessment; and
- issues for funding.

The report concludes with some key questions for

initial teacher education providers and policy makers, and lists areas for future research.

Key points

There was considerable support from staff and trainees for the new subject knowledge. Many teacher educators, however, were not sure how to interpret the DfES subject specifications in terms of content, level and depth. The specifications were interpreted and assessed in different ways on different programmes.

The courses brought together two training traditions: generic adult teacher education and LLN subject specialist teacher education. Trainers from both traditions were working to combine the two and make meaningful links between them.

In practice, the study found that generic teaching knowledge and subject knowledge were combined in different ways, often in the same institution. On some programmes they were fully integrated, others partially integrated them and some taught subject knowledge only, leaving generic teaching knowledge to be pursued elsewhere, if needed.

Some trainers and trainees were concerned that the amount of subject knowledge being covered meant that theory was marginalising practice. For others, the balance seemed right.

There was variation in how much attention courses gave to techniques and strategies specific to adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL.

✘ In terms of initial assessment, some courses had no identifiable recruitment strategy, while others carried out detailed diagnostic tests. There was little evidence of programmes drawing on the diversity of trainees' backgrounds and experience, as yet, or of accreditation of prior learning.

✘ Most trainers and some trainees had concerns about the quantity and quality of the teaching practice placements and workplace mentoring available; some courses took creative and innovative approaches to this. The quality of observation visits varied between programmes.

✘ The study found little consistency across the universities in terms of numbers of course hours, structure of modular programmes and university credit systems. All the courses, however, involved extra time and expenditure and this needs to be recognised if they are to continue.

✘ Universities found difficulty in attracting qualified and experienced specialist trainers and were looking for new forms of partnership with colleges. This shortage was particularly acute in numeracy.

Background and rationale of research

The study aimed to enable institutions and practitioners to learn from the range of approaches being trialled and to inform future practice.

Main elements of research

The researchers used questionnaires, individual interviews with staff and focus groups with trainees. Emerging findings were shared with practitioners at a national conference, and discussion of the issues further informed the findings of the project.

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References and Further Reading

Subject Specifications for Teachers of Adult Literacy and Numeracy. Nottingham: DfES/FENTO. DfES (2002a).

Subject Specifications for Teachers of English for Speakers of Other Languages. Nottingham: DfES/FENTO. DfES (2002b).

Guidance on using the Subject Specifications for Teachers of Adult Literacy at level 4 in conjunction with the Standards for Teaching and Supporting Learning. Nottingham: DfES/FENTO. DfES (2002c). (see also similar guidance for Adult Numeracy and ESOL).

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